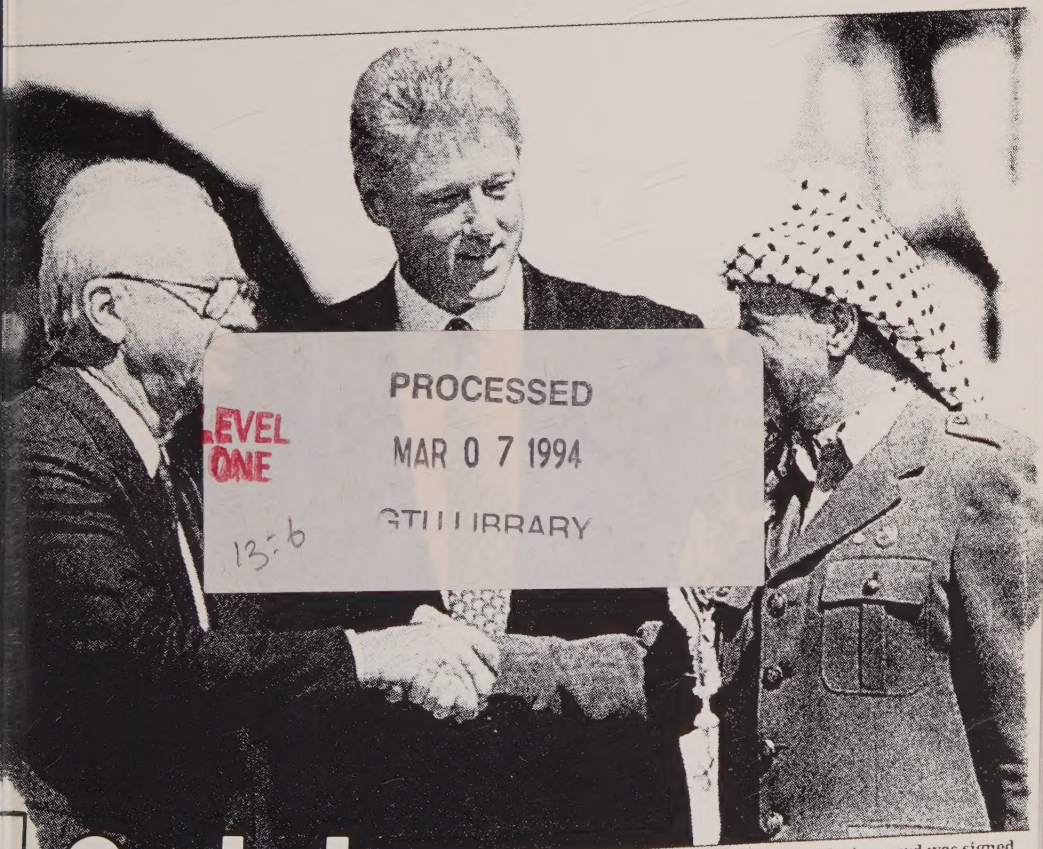


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Light on a New World

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Published for the Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia by



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VOLUME THIRTEEN

NUMBER 6

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1993

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The Potter

THE WORLD WOULD appear to be well designed and created for the work of the potter. The basic elements used by him for his craft are earth, water and fire which means that the potter has been part of peoples' lives since the earliest times as a valued member of the community.

When looking at the potter's work, we are immediately aware of its form, colour and texture; often the piece also has an obvious function, so that we can cook in it or eat and drink from it. The objects produced are tactile and demand a response from our senses as well as our minds: we can touch, pick up or feel it in our hands. So, when working this natural material, we find a dual purpose — both the pleasure and the necessity of ceramics. Working with clay can lead to immense satisfaction both for the amateur and professional, this point being especially valid today with the large market of mass-produced goods, when real satisfaction can only be gained from creating a unique piece of work.

THE MATERIAL

Clay can be found in abundance under our feet. It can be in some cases rough to the touch and in other types silky smooth. Clay has its own natural colouring and yet can be covered with a multiplicity of natural oxides, slips and glazes in order to enhance its decorative quality. When fired in a kiln above 600° Centigrade, it changes its composition from a malleable soft material through a semi-porous (biscuit) stage at 1000° Centigrade to what is to all intents and purposes a vitrified non-porous rock.

Because of being readily available in most countries throughout the world and in such vast quantities, it is both cheap and easy to create into objects ranging from bricks to porcelain teacups. In some parts of the world, people still build their houses from slabs (adobes) and coils of clay taken straight from the river banks. Its

versatility as a material is virtually inexhaustible, allowing it to be worked in many different ways using a wide variety of techniques such as throwing, pressing, moulding, pinching, coiling, etc.

One key to understanding clay is to define its most useful quality, that of being 'plastic'. When primary (non-plastic) clays which are free from impurities and large in particle size are transported by the earth's natural forces, they are beaten and bashed by the elements and pick up impurities (iron and organic materials). As they travel, they become more 'plastic'. Plasticity has much to do with the flat hexagonal shape of the clay particles and their size.

They hold water between them (like sheets of wet glass) and allow movement and therefore a shape by slipping and sliding around each other without falling to pieces. As the shape dries out, they no longer have that plastic quality and stop slipping, become rigid and hold their shape. By adding water, the shape will be lost and it will return to its base form. With so many types of clay available, each having slightly different properties, 'blending and purifying' has to occur in order to achieve the required mix for the task set.

It will not be helpful to look at the potter within a set geographical location and also to go back in time. The climate here in Great Britain is so variable that even in the summer months the airborne moisture content can retard the drying process prior to firing. If we travel south and then east, the better the climate becomes for the potter. After being created, pots can dry quickly and naturally in the hot sun and are soon ready for firing; with no unexpected downpours of rain, pots can be left outside without fear of being ruined.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROCESS

Historically, there are also some points to be considered. Today in most countries, we take for granted our electricity, gas or coal as everyday energy sources. Take these away and we are left with other natural materials such as grass and wood to fuel our kilns. This can bring with it other problems such as lack of temperature control and basic kiln design. Many of the 'bonfire' type firings achieve only a very low success rate with some finished pieces being destroyed by too much heat, others not enough heat or too quickly cooled and some because they were imperfectly constructed. It is, however, a survival of the fittest and certainly of those going to be most useful to the potter in the future. This test by fire is referred to by Paul and has an application to us.¹

Bearing in mind the relative lack of control which the potter under consideration had, his skill and expertise were remarkable. The potter's role in society up until modern industrial times was one of craftsman, similar in comparison to the English 18th Century blacksmith.

¹I Corinthians 3.13-15

It is perhaps correct to say that 'pottery' was discovered accidentally, probably when a clay-lined reed basket was accidentally burnt rendering the fired or baked clay useable as a pot on its own. Some of the earliest pottery discovered is hand-built and has been found in the Near East. It was not until the advent of the potter's wheel that this craft was revolutionised and the first example of the potter as a professional person 'in his own right' was found in Lachish in Israel in the form of a large workshop.

Perhaps one of the most striking illustrations (in a practical sense) in the Bible is when God specifically instructs his prophet Jeremiah to go to the potter so that God's words would be better understood.² The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, uses once again the practical example of the potter to the Gentiles, in speaking out against man having anything to say against God.³

Clay, by its very nature being a 'refined' mud and therefore common, although fragile, can be found in the shape of domestic ware strewn over most archaeological sites; we may even have dug up some pieces in our own back gardens. Small pieces of pot sherds made from broken pots or occasionally made purposefully called ostraca were used as a base for writing letters, short messages, lists or receipts, anything of a more or less temporary nature, used and then thrown away. Some lasting many centuries have been found in Lachish, Arad and Jerusalem and are valuable not only for our knowledge of the Hebrew script but also with regard to the political and economic life of the period. So we have an example of the potter's work, meant to be provisional, but which has become semi-permanent and is of invaluable use to historians.

Clay tablets were used for writing on and in some cases this practice continued nearly up until the Christian era and is thought to have been invented by the Sumerians who had an abundance of clay as a natural material. A clay envelope was made, the tablet inserted and then the 'letter' sealed and sent. If the message on the outside did not correspond with the one on the inside, someone must have tampered with the information. This form of communication involved the potter in a different type of work than the ones we have previously mentioned.

Clay then is strewn over the face of the earth. Population movements and trade routes have been charted simply by the positioning and dating of pottery. Clay has been used for making objects to store grain in, for writing manuscripts on, for drinking and eating from or for oil lamps and the sherds for writing on and, in the case of Job, as a scraper when he was smitten with boils.⁴

The preparation of the clay before use by the potter is thorough and time-consuming. The clay, when dug from the ground, was trodden by peoples' feet to form a paste. This idea of a thorough mixing and sorting is used by the Prophet

²Jeremiah 18.1-6 ³Romans 9.20,21 ⁴Job 2.8

Isaiah.⁵ This 'wedged' clay was then placed by the potter on the wheel by which he sat and was shaped by him using his hands. It is not certain at what date the wheel first came into use, but after some of the earliest pots appear (at Jericho) around 5,000 BC and until 3,000 BC, they were moulded by hand and thereafter, as in Egypt, most sizes and shapes were wheel made.

The wheel was constructed using a wooden or stone disc placed on a larger one and turned by the potter, his apprentice or by using a treadle. Quite often the wheel was set in a pit unlike today's wheels which are almost entirely free-standing units above ground. In Jeremiah, we have the two stones of the wheel mentioned.⁶ After this forming process, the pot is then dried and fettled and smoothed to remove the rough or sharp edges. Generally the clay is twice fired, once to around 1000°C, then glazed and fired a second time. The glaze cover is used for decoration and to render the object watertight.⁷

LESSONS IN ANTIQUITY

Job gives us an illustration concerning the material state of clay houses — (bricks are commonly made of clay, Biblical evidence of which can be seen from the Israelites' task of making them for their Egyptian masters).⁸ Job, in his thoughts about houses, is illustrating our transient and fleeting nature which does not necessarily have the length of life of a moth and which will eventually crumble back to its clay foundation. He illustrates this very thought directly in showing God's power.¹⁰

We are all put into perspective by those words again by Job and when he says that our remembrances and arguments or our memorable sayings are like ashes and clay.¹¹ He is reminded by his companion Elihu that all people are equal in God's sight and have the same humble beginnings and therefore, by logical extension, the same end.¹²

David, in the Psalms, speaks of God's goodness and the fact that he alone is that firm foundation in our lives.¹³ The prophet Daniel's record about the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who was represented as the head of gold on the image, foretells the fall of the various world empires represented by other parts of the body. As we go down the image, it gradually degrades to base metal and clay at the feet, the iron and clay being today's nations (some strong, some weak).¹⁴ We wait for fulfilment of that interpretation when Jesus Christ will return to set up God's kingdom, never to be destroyed.¹⁵

It is of note that Jesus himself mixed spittle and dust (everyday natural materials) to make clay in order that the people about him should see the miracle of the restoration of sight in a very practical and physical way.¹⁶

⁵Isaiah 41.25 ⁶Jeremiah 18.3 ⁷Proverbs 26.23 ⁸Exodus 1.13,14 ⁹Job 4.19 ¹⁰Job 10.9

¹¹Job 13.12 ¹²Job 33.6 ¹³Psalms 40.2 ¹⁴Daniel 2.33 ¹⁵Daniel 2.34 ¹⁶John 9.6

So in conclusion we see that God, through His inspired word, uses the 'potter and his clay' to illustrate many fundamental points in our belief: that we are mortal, that we are all the same and yet quite different, that we need God's word as a sure foundation in our lives and that we are now in the last times of our present age.

That we are the clay and God the potter is in no doubt when we read Isaiah 64 v 8. He will surely not then reject those that are so entirely dependent on him and wish of their own freewill to be moulded as clay into God's mould.

Stephen Talmadge
Ipswich

COVER PICTURE

(Photograph credit Associated Press)

Our cover illustration for this issue of *Light on a New World* is a reminder to all readers of the amazing events which crept up on the world at large. Sworn enemies since the establishment of the State of Israel, the signing of the peace accord and the hand-shaking on the lawns of the White House in Washington, almost caught the world off-balance. What does it all portend?

Israel are undeniably at the centre of God's purpose with the earth. They are the Sign of our Times that God is about to intervene in this world's affairs. Concerning this time, the time of the end, the Apostle Paul wrote to the ecclesia at Thessalonica:

'But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, **Peace and safety**; then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child;'¹

Are we seeing yet another sign of the early return of Christ to the earth and perhaps even more important, **ARE WE READY?**

¹*Thessalonians 5.1-3*

VERITATIS SPLENDOR

The recent encyclical message from the Pope, addressed to Catholic Bishops throughout the world, has caused no little concern among the Catholic faithful. It is considered by those interested in the doctrine espoused by the Papacy to be a highly technical and lengthy exposition of the principles which underpin Catholic morality. The encyclical is also considered to be a call to arms. It rails against a modern view of morality that plays down the concept of individual guilt.

Many Catholics will find this re-affirmation of moral principles difficult to put into practice, and while respecting the teaching of the church on this topic, will honour it in the breach.

Is the Pope right?

There is only one standard of appeal if we are to be true to the Almighty God, who alone should be addressed as 'Our Father'.¹ The Word of God **must** be the sole standard of appeal. It is not, for true followers of Christ to ask if the Pope or any other earthly leader is right, but to ask, 'Is this the teaching of the Bible?' It is a sad fact that very few so-called Christians consult the Word of God and then act upon the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Where the Pope speaks according to the Bible, he is to be applauded. Pre-marital sex, homosexuality and divorce IS sin in the sight of God, and the Bible is clear on these and so many other aspects which concern morality in general.

The Christadelphian view is a simple one:

'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this WORD, **it is because there is no light in them.**'²

The emphasis within the above text is quite deliberate on our part, because it draws to the attention of all that there is one source of infallible truth, The Word of the Living God.

Perhaps rather than the latin VERITATIS SPLENDOR our watchword should be that which appears on the title page of many Bibles: DOMINUS ILLUMINA TIO MEA, or in plain English: LORD ENLIGHTEN ME.

CUM PRIVILEGIO
(With privilege)

¹Luke 11.2 ²Isaiah 8.20

Incline Thine Ear Unto Wisdom

'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches'¹

RICHES — HOW MUCH importance mankind places in them! More than our basic human need for food and water, riches are held up as the answer to all our problems. This is perhaps no more true than in our world today, where advances in manufacturing and technology have resulted in an ever increasing availability of more and more sophisticated products. Allied to this has come enormous pressure from the advertising media, pressure to have these things to make our lives complete. Coupled with these pressures the financial institutions have made credit more easily available so that we can have the things we believe we need right now.

Small wonder that the Third World, whose leaders are often influenced by their First World education, view these technological achievements enviously, desiring a similar way of life for themselves and their own peoples. The world's financial community is quite happy to provide the means to satisfy this need thus further fuelling demand for the First World's products.

The 'get rich quick, live now — pay later' philosophy is a core theme in our world today: paradoxically it is also the root of much of the crime, social unrest and poverty.

The efforts man is prepared to go to to obtain riches is perhaps best exemplified in his strivings to plunder the world's natural resources with little consideration for the long term effects. Forests have been raped with no consideration for the ecological

¹Proverbs 22.1

impact, large areas of countryside scarred for ever with open cast mines. Man is prepared to lie, cheat, even murder in pursuit of these riches, and ultimately nations are even prepared to go to war.

For those not directly involved in the pursuit of the world's natural riches there are countless other opportunities. There is the wealth of others to manipulate and the courts are full of cases which publically demonstrate the lengths to which these individuals are prepared to lie and cheat, often ruining the lives of those who have put their trust in them in the process. A good name? Any interest in a clean reputation is swept aside in the drive for greater and greater wealth.

What does the Bible have to say about riches? Solomon, king of Israel, was provided with the means both in time and money to experience everything a man could wish for. In retrospect, and in his later years, he recorded the following:

'Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless, ie empty, a chasing after wind.'²

Riches, Solomon concluded, provided no satisfaction and his summary of a life spent in their pursuit, reads:

'Then I looked on all the works that my hand had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.'³

Jesus also spoke to those around him on the subject of riches and their true value. He told a parable about a rich man, describing an individual who had amassed a great deal of wealth, a man who lacked nothing at all, and thought he had sufficient wealth to enjoy life to the full for many years to come. Yet that very night, whilst he was dreaming of even greater plans for his future, his life was taken. All the material things in which he had placed so much faith immediately became completely irrelevant.

In the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught clearly that riches have at best fleeting value, and are no more permanent than the flower which blossoms in the field one day and is gone the next. Moth and rust damage riches, and thieves steal them, he said.⁴

Jesus also taught that the desire for riches can blind a man to the really important things in life. In the parable of the sower he demonstrates that riches, styled as the 'cares of this life' quickly choke the development of the seed corn of God's Word, eventually killing the development off.⁵

²Ecclesiastes 5.10 (NIV) ³Ecclesiastes 2.11 ⁴Matthew 6.19-21 ⁵Luke 8.14

INCLINE THINE EAR UNTO WISDOM

Money and possessions have a certain importance in life, but there is a basic principle which should govern our relationship with them. Jesus made another statement in the Sermon on the Mount:

‘No man can serve two masters . . . ye cannot serve God and mammon.’⁶

In Jesus’ day to be a servant was to be a slave, the possession of the master. Jesus taught that a man should never be the slave of his possessions, but consider himself as a possession of God. The removal from a man of his possessions and comforts should not remove the meaning of his life.

In the same Sermon on the Mount Jesus added:

‘. . . where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.’⁷

Another parable of Jesus, that of the rich young man, expands his teaching. The young man came to Jesus enquiring about the requirements for inheritance of eternal life. Jesus replied that to achieve his desire he must sell all that he had and give away the proceeds. At this point the young man lost interest because he was very rich. Jesus possessed Spirit given abilities to look behind the face and into the heart of a man. He saw that what was wrong with the young man was not the possessions that he had, but his attitude towards them. He was possessed by his possessions and not vice versa, for if he had used what he had to help and comfort others, Jesus would not have instructed him as he did.

A man must therefore dominate his wealth and possessions, and not vice versa. Following the parable of the young man, Jesus continues in saying that whilst it is not impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, it is very difficult. Riches are a real danger, for it is clear that the richer a man is, the more temptations he has. A whole new range of temptation is available if one has the money to pay for it. So, paradoxically, the richer a man is in this world’s goods, the more likely he is to need God.

Fundamentally riches are a very insecure foundation for life. Ultimately, whatever else proves true we cannot take our riches with us when we die:

‘For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.’⁸

Paul wrote to Timothy. In this same passage Paul instructs Timothy to advise those considered rich by the world’s standards not to trust in those material riches, but to trust instead in God and invest in what is described as a ‘*good foundation against the time to come*.’⁹

⁶Matthew 6.24 ⁷Matthew 6.21 ⁸I Timothy 6.7 ⁹I Timothy 6.19

Given this clear teaching that riches are not a good foundation for life, where does Bible teaching direct a man to expend his efforts?

'Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.'¹⁰

'She [wisdom] is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.'¹¹

'Riches and honour are with me; [wisdom] yea, durable riches and righteousness.'¹²

What is the wisdom about which Solomon speaks in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes? It is not wisdom in the conventional sense that tends to concentrate on possession of knowledge.

'*The fear of the Lord*' is described as the source of wisdom, and the search for wisdom is likened to the search a man is prepared to make for a hidden treasure.¹³ True wisdom doesn't just happen — it must be sought out.

The application of this true wisdom enables a man to come closer to the Great Creator, and provides hope, protection, and a guide to the pathway through life:

'For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.'¹⁴

True wisdom, wisdom from God, is therefore a guide lamp to a man's path, providing guidance as to how he should behave.

God's Word provides further clarification of true wisdom. We are told of the origin of wisdom, and of its ultimate purpose. Wisdom is the thought and reason behind the whole of God's Creation:

'The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth.'¹⁵

Wisdom is the reason behind God's plan and purpose for the world. It is fundamental to the control God exerts in the world, influencing events and the lives of individuals to further that purpose.

In the interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, a dream which anticipated the future history of the world from the time of Babylon to today and beyond, the prophet Daniel declared:

'... Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things.'¹⁶

¹⁰Ecclesiastes 7.12 (NIV) ¹¹Proverbs 3.15 ¹²Proverbs 8.18 ¹³Proverbs 2.1-5

¹⁴Proverbs 2.6-9 ¹⁵Proverbs 3.19 ¹⁶Daniel 2.20-22

INCLINE THINE EAR UNTO WISDOM

This wisdom, contained in God's Word, requires effort to search out, but its discovery will provide for far more lasting satisfaction than mere riches. Solomon, one of the richest men who ever lived, provides his final comparison:

'Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.'¹⁷

Effort is required to find wisdom, but God is more than willing to assist a man in the task. Help is available if asked in faith through prayer:

'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him.'¹⁸

The right application of knowledge, in wisdom, will result in a man having a good reputation in the eyes of both God and man — '*a good name*'¹⁹ — both now with man, and for now and the future with God. These good names are recorded by God in the Book of Life, the book to be opened at the return of Jesus, the book naming those who will find true everlasting riches in God's Kingdom.

Make sure your effort is targetted on the riches that are of *real* value.

M Coverley
Milton Keynes

¹⁷Proverbs 8.10,11 ¹⁸James 1.5 ¹⁹Proverbs 3.4 (NIV)

One Bible

THE ONLY MESSAGE OF GOD FOR MANKIND

THE BIBLE IS unique. It alone makes the claim to be the Word of God and it alone claims to have a message for mankind. It is a message of hope and it offers long term solutions to the troubles which affect the world. There have been times in this country when hope seemed to appear on the horizon. A brave new world was envisaged after the 1914-1918 war with the setting up of the League of Nations.

Twenty years later that hope was dashed as Thirties' armies marched into neighbouring countries and the 1939-1945 war in Europe and the Far East burst upon the world. Then it was the turn of the United Nations Organisation to point the way forward, but it too has failed to maintain the stability and peace which its founders were striving for. Late in the 1980's the Berlin Wall came tumbling down and with it the end of the East-West Cold War, yet still there is no worldwide peace.

The scene has changed but not for the better. Despite sterling diplomatic efforts and threats by large nations to impose ceasefires with force, if necessary, conflicts in Europe and Africa continue unabated as this article is written. Coupled with the continuing scene of violence and destruction there are economic problems which face so many governments around the world. The catalogue of problems is enormous including rising crime rates and unemployment. Smallpox, once a killer disease, has now been eradicated only to be replaced by the deadly AIDS virus.

Well-meaning politicians and world leaders struggle to prevent things from getting worse but few now venture definite opinions on how to put things right in the long term. Church leaders do not speak with a united voice. Many are, understandably, concerned with the problems that face their members and the world in general. Their efforts appear to concentrate on alleviating present day-to-day problems such as poverty, starvation and poor housing conditions.

There is a great deal of comfort offered to those in distress both emotionally and physically but it is nearly all related to the present time and gives no hope of the final solution. There are disputes among religious factions such as those which occur in Northern Ireland between two sections of the 'Christian' church and in India between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. More recently in Eastern Europe ethnic and religious rivalry has reared its ugly head.

There is reference to church teaching when moral and religious matters are under discussion but rarely, if ever, is this backed up by Bible teaching. Despite this situation there are optimists who say '*Things will get better*' and there are pessimists who say '*Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.*' There are others who ask '*Is there another way? Is this life all there is or is there a message of hope to be found somewhere?*'

Students of the Bible believe that there is and they believe that it is to be found in the Word of God. They believe that the Bible contains the only message revealed by God the Creator. There is no other book or authority which makes such a claim. What is that message? It is that the earth will not be destroyed as many fear and that it will be lived in by a population who will enjoy peace and long life far beyond anything anyone has yet experienced.

In the ancient prophecy of Isaiah these words are found:

'For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited . . .'¹

This claim was confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ:

'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth . . .'²

As this state of affairs has not yet come about we are led into believing that it is still in the future. We can be sure of this on the basis that as many Bible prophecies have already been fulfilled others will come to pass in accordance with God's plan for the earth and mankind.

There are two aspects to the future foretold in the Bible. One is the nature and condition of this planet on which we live and the other is the nature of its future inhabitants.

In spite of the lessening tension between East and West, often referred to as the 'Cold War', the preparation for war goes on even if the activity has been scaled down

¹Isaiah 45.18 ²Matthew 5.5

in some countries. There has been no period since 1945 when there has not been a war going on somewhere in the world. Now, consider the Bible message as reported by the prophet Isaiah referring to the nations:

'They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'³

Tanks and combine harvesters were unknown in Isaiah's time but the principle of the message is evidently clear for all to understand.

It is supported by the Psalmist words:

'He [God] maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the Chariot in the fire.'⁴

Again the type of weapons used in warfare today may have changed but the message that peace will be imposed by divine decree is clear. What is also clear is that there will be a return to the idyllic conditions experienced by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they sinned by disobeying God's commands. That disobedience resulted in the curse of sin, disease and death being placed upon Adam and Eve. In Genesis chapter 3 the whole of the sentence handed down to Adam and Eve, because of their disobedience, is recorded and we can see from the following extract from that Divine sentence that it included a curse upon the earth.

For we read:

'... Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; ... thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; ... in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground ...'⁵

The cleansing of the earth by the reversal of the curse is all part of God's only message for mankind.

Included in that message are these passages:

'... The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.'⁶

'... For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.'⁷

Other changes for good will occur. The increase in crop yield will be dramatic with even high hilltops producing grain as mentioned in Psalm 72. All these changes will work toward the time prophesied by Ezekiel.

³Isaiah 2.4 ⁴Psalm 46.9 ⁵Genesis 3.17-19 ⁶Isaiah 35.1 ⁷Isaiah 35.6,7

'And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.'⁸

The environment will be improved far beyond the dreams of anyone who is campaigning for these things now, making for a much better world for people to live in. However, this will not be of much consolation to the population of the future if it is still subject to disease and death. In order to enjoy these wonderful surroundings the inhabitants of the earth will need good health and long life and that is just what is promised in passages like these:

'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing . . .'⁹

'Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; . . . For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people . . .'¹⁰

What could be more desirable than long life in a world where the environment is being controlled and cared for and not being destroyed as it is at present?

Certainly that would be a good start but there are other things that affect the inhabitants of any nation. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 65 spoke of another problem that will be dealt with in the future. Housing has become a problem because of the current recession with many properties being repossessed. Yet there are thousands of people in some of the poorer countries who consider themselves fortunate if they can just sleep in someone else's doorway.

Contrast these statements:

' . . . they shall build houses, and inhabit them; . . . they shall not build, and another inhabit . . . mine elect shall long enjoy the works of their hands.'¹¹

In the same chapter we can read other parts of this vision of the future. There will be no labouring in vain — trouble will become a thing of the past because the people of the future age will be God-fearing.

As Isaiah wrote:

'They are the seed of the blessed of the Lord.'¹²

The animal kingdom will also be included in these blessings:

'The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock.'¹³

The prophet rounds off this part of the prophecy with these words:

' . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.'¹³

⁸Ezekiel 36.30 ⁹Isaiah 35.5,6 ¹⁰Isaiah 65.20-22 (NIV) ¹¹Isaiah 65.21,22 ¹²Isaiah 65.23

¹³Isaiah 65.25

Because Britain once had a far-flung empire upon which the sun never set, the English language is spoken and understood in many parts of the world, yet undoubtedly it would be of untold benefit if there was a universal language. The attempt to overcome this problem with Esperanto did not succeed but there will be a reversal of the curse placed upon man at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel.

Before then it is recorded in Genesis that:

'The whole earth was of one language, and of one speech'.¹⁴

Then the people of the earth began to go their own way and forgot God with the result that He confused their language. Unable then to communicate with each other they parted company and spread themselves into other areas.

The prophet Zephaniah wrote of the time when this situation will be remedied and when at the same time people will once again be united in the worship of God:

'Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder'.¹⁵

Bible students believe that whilst the blessings to be bestowed upon the earth are unconditional, this principle does not apply to those who aspire to enjoy those blessings. The words of Jesus Christ quoted earlier in this article '*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*' give a clue to the fact that the future blessings will be enjoyed by those who have responded to the call of the Gospel and who eagerly await the time spoken of Jesus when he will say to them on his right hand:

'Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'.¹⁶

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¹⁴Genesis 11.1 ¹⁵Zephaniah 3.9 (NIV) ¹⁶Matthew 25.34